Jean-Luc Brunel, held on suspicion of supplying girls to Epstein, found hanged

Former model agency boss accused of rape and suspected of trafficking minors has died in prison

Kim Willsher *in Paris*

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The former boss of a French model agency accused of rape and under investigation on suspicion of supplying underage girls to the late American financier Jeffrey Epstein has been found dead in prison.

The body of Jean-Luc Brunel, 75, was reportedly found hanging in his cell in the early hours of Saturday. The French prosecutors' office confirmed the report and said an inquiry had been opened into the exact cause of death, but early indications pointed to suicide.

Brunel was arrested in December 2020 at Charles de Gaulle airport before boarding a plane for Dakar in Senegal where he told police he was going on holiday.

He was officially put under investigation on allegations of the alleged rape of a minor and sexual harassment shortly after his arrest, and was put under a second investigation for the rape of a minor in June last year.

Investigators had also questioned Brunel on suspicion of the human trafficking of underage girls for sexual exploitation. He was being held on remand in La Santé prison in Paris.

Several top models had come forward to accuse him of sexual assault and rape, and French police had reportedly interviewed hundreds of potential witnesses. Brunel had denied any wrongdoing or any involvement in illegal activities. He disappeared from public life shortly after Epstein's death in August 2019. Epstein also hanged himself in his prison cell while awaiting trial.

In the 1990s, Paris-born Brunel was a model talent scout and boss of the prestigious agency Karin Models. After he was banned from the agency in European 1999 following a BBC undercover report on abuse in the fashion industry, he moved to the US and founded MC2 Model Management with funding from Epstein. He is credited with discovering a number of supermodels including Christy Turlington and Milla Jovovich.

He met Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein's partner, in the 1980s and she had introduced him to Epstein.

Brunel had been released on bail last November but had been ordered to return to prison after a few days to await trial.

His legal team said in a statement: "His distress was that of a man of 75 years old caught up in a media-legal system that we should be questioning. Jean-Luc Brunel

never stopped claiming his innocence and had made many efforts to prove it. His decision [to end his life] was not driven by guilt but by a deep sense of injustice."

In 2015, Virginia Roberts Giuffre, who recently accepted an undisclosed sum from Prince Andrew - another Epstein friend - after bringing a civil case against the royal, accused Brunel of supplying girls to Epstein. She said the American financier had bragged to her that he had slept with more than 1,000 "of Brunel's girls".

Giuffre, who was abused by Epstein, had claimed she had sex with Prince Andrew on three occasions, the first of which when she was 17 years old. The prince had denied her claims.

Maxwell, 59, is currently in prison in the US, having been convicted of sex trafficking.

French prosecutors said Brunel's death would put an end to the legal case unless other suspects were put under investigation.